Interdisciplinary Studies 121.19: Texts and Contexts (Race and Social Media)

Fall 2014 Section 2: MW 12:35-1:50pm STV 308

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Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00am-12:30pm and by appointment

Course Description

IDS 121.19 is an interdisciplinary, writing-intensive course investigating humanities texts within their historical and cultural contexts. This section is staffed by the English Department, and I am a Rhetoric and Composition specialist interested in the intersection of writing, technology, and race. Accordingly, in this section of 121.19, we will be investigating how race emerges on the Internet, and most often on social media, and what the effects are of those emergences.

This course is based on the idea that race is a historically created, socially constructed worldview with vast ramifications for people's lives that has been and continues to be one of the largest organizing features of the U.S. With that understanding, we will investigate how different populations engage with online technologies and social media in particular; how online environments expedite racial

New Yorker, 1993

stereotypes and construct racialized identities; and how social justice movements combat limiting representations and fight toward racial equality. These investigations into how race and racism manifest on the Internet take place amidst decades-long debates about how the Internet might mediate the inequalities that exist in our physical spaces, despite much evidence to the contrary.

These investigations will be facilitated by readings from a number of disciplines, from critical race studies to sociology to education to new media studies, but they are primarily informed by digital writing studies within English Studies, although no prior knowledge is required. In addition to the assigned readings, we will examine numerous online texts throughout the semester, from social media sites to corporate websites to blogs to news articles and more. In addition to analyzing external texts, students will also engage in self-reflection about their own internet and social media use as well as research social media use within their own social circles.

Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical and social construction of race and how the Internet participates in this construction;
- Demonstrate an awareness of the some of the covert and overt ways that racism manifests online and its effects;

- Demonstrate knowledge of whether and how various online spaces, including online communities and social media sites, construct racialized identities;
- Demonstrate understanding of some of the ways that racial justice activism happens online, along with various suggested approaches for intervening in and combating racism online; and
- Demonstrate critical analysis of how the above factors affect one's own use of the Internet and social media.

Course Materials
- Everett, Anna. (Ed.). (2008). *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Additional readings that you will need to access from our course ReggieNet site.

*The policies that follow in this syllabus are intended to function as a contract. By staying in this course, you are signaling that you understand and agree to the policies contained therein.

The Onion, 2013

Attendance
Attending class is important for your success in this course and important for everyone in order to make class a productive, communal learning environment. In order to support that mission, beginning with the **third** absence, your final letter grade will be lowered by **1/3 letter grade per absence**. The University does not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences except in the case of an approved University event such as a sporting or musical event (in which case I must be notified **in advance**).

Because it is disruptive for students to come into class late, three tardies add up to one absence (and these are cumulative). Leaving early counts as a tardy. Missing significant portions of a class counts as an absence. If late attendance becomes an issue for the class, I reserve the right to disallow late additions to class entirely.

Participation
This classroom is a learning community, and all students must participate in order for it to function as one. Participation includes speaking during class discussion and being actively involved in all class activities. Keep cell phones off (not on vibrate), do not text, and do not listen to music during class time (no earphones please). Please avoid side conversations during class time and stay awake. If you have a question, it is probable that other students have the same question, so please feel confident asking it aloud.

Active participation means being timely with responses and assignments as well as being respectful and kind in all interactions with instructors and students. Disrespect in any form, including in our online interactions, will not be tolerated. Please approach me with any issues that arise as soon as possible.

Instructor Response Time

I strongly encourage you to come see me during office hours, even if it is just to say hi. Establishing a relationship with me will greatly facilitate our working relationship throughout the semester. Regarding response time: Please allow **24 hours** for me to respond to emails and discussion posts. I will probably respond sooner if it is during business hours, but please note that I live a family friendly lifestyle that does not allow for immediate responses during evenings or weekends. Please also normally expect **one week** for feedback on assignments. I usually return homework items within one class period and longer assignments may take more than one week, but please use one week to manage your expectations.

Assignments and Grades

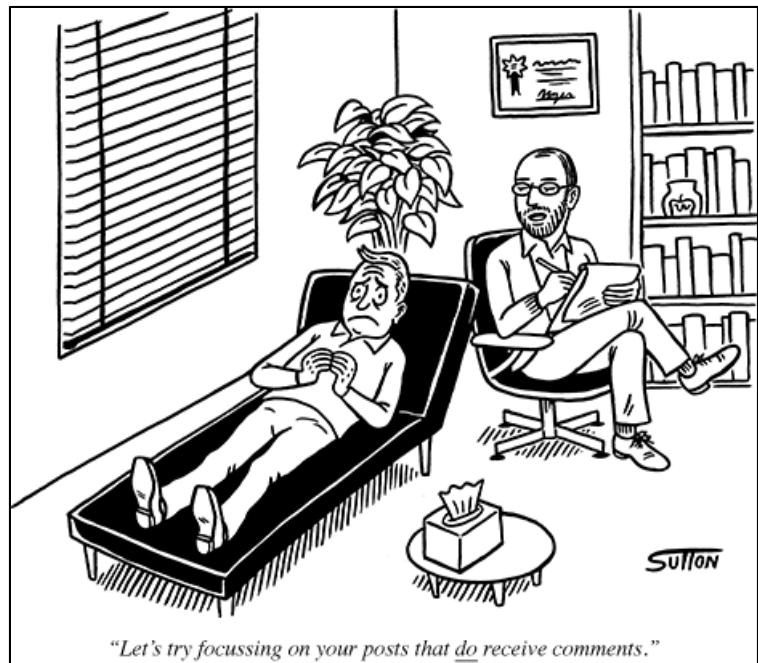The grading scale for course is:

            90-100 = A
            80-89 = B
            70-79 = C
            60-69 = D
            Below 60 = F

Course grades are comprised of:*

    Homework**   40%
    Test 1   10%
    Project 1   20%
    Test 2   10%
    Project 2   20%
    Total   100%

Please note that these are subject to change depending on the pace and needs of the course.

"Let's try focussing on your posts that _do_ receive comments."

The New Yorker, 2013

Homework includes daily homework, in-class work, quizzes, participation, peer review, presentations, student-instructor conferences, and any other small assignments as assigned. There will be two small **tests** during this semester that will build off of the other assignments for the course. Their purpose is to ensure that you are keeping up with and able to synthesize the material. There will be two **projects** for this class, both of which will be completed **in groups**. The first project consists of analyzing a recent race and social-media related controversy, event, or movement. The second project consists of applying some aspect of the course to your field of study. Assignment sheets will be provided for both of these projects.

Late work

The learning in this course requires in-depth reading, reflection, writing, discussion, and significant group work. In order to meet all of the goals of those activities, everyone must complete all of the work for this class according to the given deadlines. According, late work will not be accepted. In cases of emergency,

please contact me ASAP so that arrangements can be made. Work is often not turned in because people are having trouble with the assignments before the due date, so please contact me in advance so I can assist you.

Plagiarism
Overt plagiarism is rare (such as submitting work for this course that was prepared for another course or by someone else), although all cases of plagiarism are indeed serious and must be reported to ISU's Office of Community Rights and Responsibilities. What is more common is unintentional plagiarism, the kind that arises when one fails to sufficiently attribute the use of someone else's ideas or quotations. Please properly cite all of your sources in order to avoid any associations with plagiarism. We will only briefly discuss citation styles, so please let me know if you need assistance beyond what we discuss in class.

"*Thanks to Kickstarter, we're building a tunnel.*"
The New Yorker, 2012

Technology
We will use ReggieNet, ISU's course management system, for this course; all course materials, including assignments and supplementary readings, will be uploaded there and you will upload homework and essays there. You will need to check ReggieNet AND your ilstu.edu email account regularly (at least several times per week) as I will use both platforms to make announcements.

I will usually ask you to upload your work online, either to ReggieNet or a course blog, although I might occasionally ask you to print something. When uploading files online, please be conscientious about **file type** and **file names**. I use a PC and need files in Word or rich text file formats **(.doc, .docx, or .rtf)**. I cannot open files in .pages (a Mac document) or .wps (Microsoft Works file), for example. However, please note that ISU now offers a FREE version of Microsoft Office 365, so all students have access to Word (go to http://at.illinoisstate.edu/office365). Please also save your files using names that will help me understand what it is, such as using your **last name** and **the project name** (McDuffieProject2.docx).

Because technological problems happen early and often but will not excuse you from work that is due, be sure to save your work often and in multiple places (personal computer, email it to yourself, upload to google docs or dropbox, save on USB/flash/jump drive, etc.). Although ReggieNet works fine most of the time, I have heard reports of technical issues, such as it timing out when writing a discussion post, freezing during a quiz, or not allowing a file upload. Even though these should be rare, I recommend submitting your work several hours ahead of the deadline in case you need to troubleshoot. To begin, try different browsers when you have trouble (I recommend Internet Explorer and ISU's Center for Teaching and Learning recommends Firefox). For long pieces of writing, you can compose your work elsewhere and copy/paste it to ReggieNet using the "Paste from Word" button (do not simply copy/paste or you will have substantial html errors). You can also reach out to me and ISU's tech support for help (https://helpdesk.illinoisstate.edu/). There is also a ReggieNet YouTube Channel that has tutorial videos (search in YouTube for ReggieNet and look for Videos for Students).

Special Needs and Accommodations

I am committed to making this classroom accessible to all needs and learning styles. Students who desire consideration because of any disability or situation should come see me **as soon as possible**. Any student needing to arrange an accommodation for a documented disability should also contact Disability Concerns at 350 Fell Hall, 309-438-5853 (voice) or 309-438-8620 (TTY) as soon as possible.

http://www.endslaverytn.org/slacktivism-or-activism/ 2014

Julia N. Visor Academic Center

Free outside writing assistance can be found at the Visor center, which offers consulting in almost all subjects. The Visor Center also offers study skills workshops. Call 309-438-7100 for an appointment or visit http://ucollege.illinoisstate.edu/about/visor/ for more information.

Student Counseling Services

College students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression and struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. SCS is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at Counseling.IllinoisState.edu or by calling (309) 438-3655.

Schedule

	BEFORE CLASS	DURING CLASS	AFTER CLASS
Week 1			
Aug 18		Introduction to the course; Review syllabus	
Aug 20	Read Senft and Noble, "Race and Social Media"	Discuss social media and the reading	Take syllabus quiz (due Aug 23)
Week 2			
Aug 25	Read Boyd, "It's Complicated - Introduction"	Discuss social media and the reading	Upload group notes to discussion post
Aug 27	Read "Understanding Race" Handout	Discuss the history, social construction, and current definition of race	Complete and upload discussion response
Aug 29 - Last day to drop a class without any grade and a full reduction of charges			

Week 3

Sept 1	No class - Labor Day	
Sept 3	Byrne, "The Future of (the) 'Race'" (in Everett); Write reading response and bring to class	Discuss online communities and racial identities

Week 4

Sept 8	Read Bonilla-Silva, excerpt from *Racism without Racists*	Discuss colorblindness and the language of racism today
Sept 10	Daniels, "Race, Civil Rights, and Hate Speech in the Digital Era" (in Everett); Write reading response and bring to class	Discuss covert and overt racism online

Week 5

Sept 15	Study for Test 1	Prepare for Test 1
Sept 17	Study for Test 1	Take Test 1

Week 6

Sept 22	Read Gay, "Peculiar Benefits"; Read Gay, "Justine Sacco's Aftermath"	Discuss whiteness and privilege; Introduce Project 1	Research potential topics
Sept 24	Read student examples: Support Michael and the Acceptance of Speech and Coca-Cola It's Beautiful	Look at current events, discuss student examples, and meet with groups	Vote on topics with your groups and post to discussion board for instructor approval

Week 7

Sept 29	Bring research, examples, and any drafting to class	Mini group conferences in class
Oct 1	Work on Project 1 - Bring in research to class	Prepare for workshop

Week 8

Oct 6	Draft of Project 1 Due	Workshop Project 1	Revise Project 1

Oct 8		Revise Project 1	**Project 1 Due to course blog Oct. 10**
	Oct. 10 is last day to drop a course		

Week 9			
Oct 13	Read Sandoval & Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism" (in Everett); Bring completed reading guide to class	Discuss (social media) activism and artivism	Upload reading guides; submit midterm evaluations
Oct 15		No class - I will be traveling for a conference	

Week 10			
Oct 20	Taborn, "Separating Race from Technology" (in Everett); Bring completed reading guide to class	Discuss women and minorities in STEM fields	Upload reading guides
Oct 22	López, "Circling the Cross" (in Everett); Bring completed reading guide to class	Discuss digital media literacy	Upload reading guides

Week 11			
Oct 27	Read Vie, "In Defense of Slacktivism"	Discuss slacktivism	
Oct 29	Reading #Bringbackourgirls, #Kony2012, and the complete, divisive history of 'hashtag activism'; Read Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted; Read Why Slacktivism Is Underrated	Continue slacktivism discussion; Introduce Project 2	Upload slacktivism manifestos

Week 12			
Nov 3	Study for Test 2	Prepare for Test 2	
Nov 5	Study for Test 2	**Take Test 2**	

Week 13			
Nov 10	Research Project 2 and prepare proposals	Proposals due for Project 2; discuss research	

Nov 12	Continue working on Project 2	Mini conferences in class	

Week 14			
Nov 17	Finish complete draft of Project 2	*Draft Project 2 Due*	
Nov 19		Work on Project 2	**Project 2 due Nov. 21**

Week 15		No class - Thanksgiving break	

Week 16			
Dec 1	Read Boyd, "It's Complicated - Inequality"	Discuss reading and wrap up race and social media discussions	
Dec 3	Prepare course reflections	Course Evaluations and Course Reflections	

Week 17 - Finals Week		No class - have a nice break!	

Project 1 Assignment Sheet

Due dates: **Mon, Oct. 6**: Complete draft for workshop; **Fri, Oct. 10**: Final draft due

Points: 100 (approximately 20% of course grade)

Length: At least 2,000 words

Format: In the genre of a blog post; language and citation conventions should be written accordingly; blog posts will be uploaded to our course blog at raceandsocialmedia.wordpress.com

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to apply the concepts we have learned so far to a contemporary event (the event MUST be from 2013 or 2014) and to present your analysis in a blog post. The event must be related to the course content (race and the internet/social media). **Here are some questions that can help you analyze this event:**
1. How was social media used to construct and define race and/or racialized identities (and what are those constructions and definitions) during or as a result of this event?
2. How did people use social media to facilitate and/or reproduce racism before, during, or after this event? Alternately, how did people use social media to disrupt and intervene in racism before, during, or after this event?

3. How did racial minorities use social media to develop positive racial identities or intervene in systemic racism before, during, or after this event?
4. How did people use social media sites for racial justice activism before, during, or after this event?
5. How did people use social media sites to establish and maintain white privilege activism before, during, or after this event?

Make sure that you pick something **narrow** to study, such as one social media event, in order to perform detailed analysis and make a specific argument. For example, it would be too large to cover the shooting of Michael Brown. You could, however, cover one specific person's use of Twitter to alert people outside of Ferguson to police handling of looting or the creation of the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown hashtag to draw attention to the media' use of images. Use data from the event in the platform (tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram photos, Tumblr photos or posts, etc.) to support your claims.

Audience: In addition to your instructor and your peers, the audience for this post is a general audience. Assume that a reader may not have any prior knowledge of your topics, so explain your topics accordingly.

Requirements: Include **t**he following in your blog post:
1. An **introduction** and **description** of the event that you are analyzing, with hyperlinks and other media as appropriate (video, images, etc.).
2. A clearly stated **purpose** along with a **thesis statement** indicating an argument that results from your analysis. For example, you may be investigating the way that Facebook "Likes" spread the word about the Kony 2012 video, while making the argument that ultimately it did not help it achieve its stated purpose (of removing Kony from power).
3. Critical **analysis** of the event supported by **examples**, such as screen shots of Tweets, Instagram photos, quotations from Tumblr posts, etc. Include numerous main points, or mini-arguments, that build up to your conclusions (argument).
4. Connection to the course content, such as using support from course readings in your analysis. You may actually analyze your event using a **concept** from the course; for example, does systemic racism, colorblind racial ideology, networked publics, or white invisibility drive or explain something in your data?
5. Although the format and style of this should be like that of a blog post (and can thus be informal), you should still properly **attribute** all ideas and words to their sources. Blog posts often **introduce a quote** using author's names and title of the publication, with a **hyperlink** to the piece itself. If you use these conventions, you do not need to include a Works Cited or anything more formal. (Note that when you add hyperlinks, **embed** the URLs behind words - do not copy/paste the URLs into the text.)
6. Even in informal writing, there needs to be **organization** to the piece that makes sense with strong **paragraph unity** (each paragraph has one main purpose) with **transitions** between paragraphs and ideas.
7. Revise, edit, and **proofread** carefully to ensure few (or zero) grammatical or spelling errors.

Evaluation: Your blog post will be evaluated based on how well it meets the above specifications, including:

- Demonstration that you are engaging in the course through this project, first by choosing an event relevant to the topic of this course and second through your analysis;
- Detailed description and analysis of the event;
- A clearly explained argument that arises out of and is adequately supported by examples through your analysis;
- Use of media, including visual representation of examples and hyperlinks to sources;
- Proper attribution (citation) of your sources;
- Logical organization, solid paragraph unity, appropriate transitions, and few grammatical or spelling errors;
- Failure to meet the length requirements will result in the correspondent deduction from the overall grade (i.e., if you submit ¾ of the required length, then ¼ of the overall points will be deducted).

Example Topics:

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown
Justine Sacco's aftermath: The Cost of Twitter Outrage
Ipad photo prompts debate over what the poor should have
Water is Life
How Twitter stopped the Zimmerman juror's book
The Most Tragic First World Problems Of 2013
Denied a Snow Day
Snow Hate

Resources: Sites to look at for topics:

- Look at Listicals: Worst Social Media Blunders of 2013
- General news sites: Atlantic.com, Huffingtonpost.com, Cnn.com, Usatoday.com, Nytimes.com
- Blogazine sites offer more controversial reports: Jezebel.com, Gawker.com, Buzzfeed.com
- Sites focused on race and the Internet (and social media), including activism: Colorlines.com, Salon.com, Racefiles.com, Root.com
- You can also look directly at the social media sites themselves!

Student Examples:

Support Michael and the Acceptance of Speech
Racist Hunger Games Tweets Show Racism is Still Very Much Alive Today
UCLA Student's Racist Vlog
Coca-Cola It's Beautiful
#MLKParty
Racially Stereotypical Twitter Account Reaches Over 25K Followers

Project 2 Assignment Sheet

Due dates: **Mon, Nov. 10**: Proposals due (10 points), **Mon, Nov. 17**: Complete draft for workshop (10 points), **Fri, Nov. 21:** Final draft due (100 points)

Length: Minimum length is 500 words per person in group (4 people = 2,000 words)

Format: This project is a group project in the style of a portfolio. Submit it in a Word document that includes:
- A cover page with a descriptive title, all group members names, and the date;
- A table of contents (this will be written after the rest is written)
- An introduction that includes 1) a description of the purpose of the portfolio, 2) a description of the connection between the class material (either race and/or social media) and your group's fields/majors/future workplaces/future professions/areas of interest, and 3) a review of all of the contents in the portfolio in order to explain their relevancy and their connections to the other items.
- The different items within the portfolio should follow. Each item should be titled separately and start on a new page. The different possible items will be explained in more detail below.
- The portfolio should follow a citation style, such as APA, MLA, or Chicago style. This means there should be a References or Works Cited page. I suggest looking at Purdue's Online Writing Lab as a first place for seeking help with style guides.
- The language should be relatively formal, like a report.
- Paginate the entire portfolio.
- Please use one-inch margins all around and the same font everywhere (although it is common to use different font styles for headings).

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to apply some aspect of race and/or social media (the concepts we are studying in this class) to something related to your fields of study. You can explore how systemic racism affects practices in your area, for example, or you can research how social media is changing something in your field. Or, you can make your portfolio a bit more practical for your future use. For example, if you are an education group, you could put together a portfolio of materials for teaching with social media, how to teach about race, how to teach digital activism, etc. If you are a marketing group, you could put together a portfolio that reviews best practices for marketing with social media (maybe a particular platform) or how to make socially or racially conscious marketing campaigns (considering culturally aware and culturally insensitive social medial campaigns, perhaps).
For groups that include multiple majors, do not feel like you have to find something that applies to all of your fields; rather, find something that is interesting to all of you to research. For all groups, a key to a successful project will be to make sure you are being narrow enough in your project. And being detailed and thorough is going to be based on doing sufficient research that will support a substantial portfolio. Do not simply present the research as is, however; write up the results of your research in the form of your findings, ideas, and recommendations in your own words. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from your research as appropriate and use Appendices for longer excerpts and supplementary materials (and you can always provide hyperlinks to additional materials).

Audience: You can assume that the audience for this portfolio has some knowledge of your area of interest. However, give enough background information so that someone new to the area could understand it. For example, I might not know much about your field(s), so tell me what I need to know in order to understand your application. The reverse applies as well – give enough information so that someone in your field, without any knowledge or race studies or Internet studies, could still understand your work.

Evaluation: Your portfolio will be evaluated based on how well it meets the above specifications, including:
- Inclusion of all required parts;
- Demonstration that you are engaging in the course through this project, first by choosing an event relevant to the topic of this course and second through the contents of your portfolio;
- Demonstration that you have conducted a reasonable amount of research to explore your chosen topic;
- Proper attribution (citation) of your sources;
- Logical organization, solid paragraph unity, appropriate transitions, and few grammatical or spelling errors;
- Failure to meet the length requirements will result in the correspondent deduction from the overall grade (i.e., if you submit ¾ of the required length, then ¼ of the overall points will be deducted).